GUIDE TO THE ER6 RURAL IRISH FILE

[This file focuses on the Rural Irish population located mainly in the poorer and more mountainous areas of western Ireland, including a number of small, off-shore islands. The principal administrative divisions, i.e. counties, of this region consist of the following, listed from north to south: Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, and Kerry.

Rather than attempting to outline the main features of Rural Irish culture, several outstanding aspects of this culture will be noted so that the researcher may obtain some idea of the distinctive and interesting data in this file.

First, it has been said that "Ireland has preserved to a remarkable degree the customs and social habits of the pre-industrial phase of western civilization" (9: Evans, p. 6). This pattern especially characterizes the mountainous western region. For instance, this is the region where the highest predominance of Gaelic, the indigenous language of the Irish, has been retained (4: Hooton, pp. 245-46). Elsewhere, Gaelic has evidently been largely displaced by English.

Second, in much of rural Ireland, the traditional primary unit of land division, the "townland," has survived, and as a consequence so has the townland community. "The townlands in turn group themselves into baronies corresponding to the petty kingdoms of old" (9: Evans, p. 12). The next higher level of organization is the modern county unit.

Lastly, Rural Ireland also manifests distinctive demographic patterns and trends. For example, Ireland's population is concentrated in the poorer and more mountainous western part of the country. Also, there has

been a continuous population decline, particularly in the rural areas, since the great famine of 1845, although this trend has tended to level off since 1911. But perhaps the most striking pattern is that Ireland has the highest percentage of unmarried adult men and women of any country in the world (cf. 1: Arensberg and Kimball, pp. 4, 10, 14, 98-99, 229-30).

Fifteen sources, all in English, have been processed for the ER6 Rural Irish File. The major sources are 1: Arensberg and Kimball, 8: Arensberg, 9: Evans, and 13: Evans. Sources 1 and 8 are based on data from County Clare, as is source 14, making this the best described county in the file.

Arensberg and Kimball were members of the anthropological survey of Ireland project sponsored by the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University under the direction of Hooton. This project, begun in 1931, covered physical anthropology and archeology as well as social anthropology. County Clare was chosen as the field locale on the basis of an extensive survey, because its culture represented so well a blending of the older Gaelic and modern British influences (1: Arensberg and Kimball, p. ix; 4: Hooton, p. 229).

1: Arensberg and Kimball, based on field work in 1932-34, is a study of community life and kinship among the small farmers of County Clare. One of the communities studied most intensively by Arensberg is Luogh, located on the coast about three miles from the Aran Islands (8: Arensberg, p. 20). Another field locale seems to have been the community of Rynamona in northern Clare (1: p. 181). 8: Arensberg presents six essays on different aspects of rural life, but there is much overlap with the data in source 1. 14: Westropp is a compilation of folklore derived from the oral traditions of County Clare, probably mostly gathered by the author during the early 1900s.

Evans is a geographer who did field work around 1940 mainly in Northern Ireland. 9: Evans is a general, well-illustrated work on Irish peasant culture, emphasizing material culture, and focusing primarily on Northern

Ireland, while 13: Evans is essentially an expansion of 9: Evans, with much additional information.

2: and 3: Campbell present descriptions of peasant house types as observed in 1934-35, whereas 5: Ó Danachair describes types of farmyards and practices for sheltering animals. 7: Johnson is a secondary source discussing problems and theories concerning rural settlement types.

10: and 11: Browne are the two earliest sources in the file, being based on field observations by a physician in 1893-94. Browne covers a variety of anthropological topics, with the locale of source 10 being the Islands of Inishbofin and Inishshark in western Galway, while the locale of source 11 is the western sector of the barony of Erris in County Mayo. 12: Freeman is a modern study (field date, 1954) of economic geography on the Island of Inishbofin.

The remaining sources consist of 4: Hooton, 6: Ó Súilleabháin, and 15: Fox. Hooton presents a preliminary study of some aspects of physical anthropology based on data gathered by Dupertuis and Dawson in the 1930s; Ó Súilleabháin's article is on death customs in southern Kerry; and finally, Fox discusses personal name usages on Tory Island, County Donegal.

This is a fairly well-rounded file, with data available on most facets of culture. It is weakest in the areas of language, psychology, and the fine arts, and is strong on settlement patterns, material culture, and the analysis of family and kin relations.]

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